

**LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES IN NIGERIA
AS A CONSTRAINT TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:
A REFLECTION OF THE 'END SARS' PROTEST**

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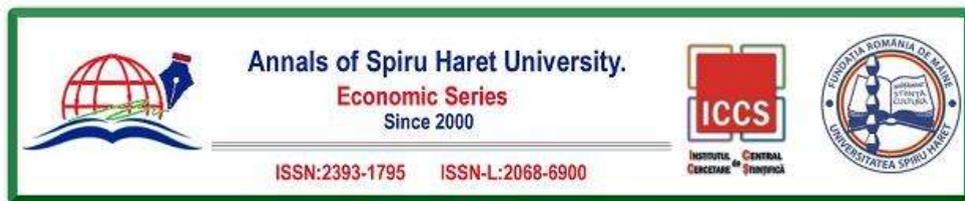
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ABSTRACT

Most of the African states have joined the roll-call of the hundreds of 'failed states' engrossed in the inter-ethnic wars, genocide and adverse and disruptive regime changes, and Nigeria is not an exception. In fact, the country has become seedbeds of violence, terrorism, mass migration of criminals across the borders, refugees' movements, etc. These factors have weakened the state as well as force it out of its public policy role towards socio economic and political development. Two decades since democracy was reintroduced in the country, Nigerians have not really witness true changes to their socio-economic well-being as expected. Broadly speaking, they are currently demanding for another kind democracy with a redeeming quality. The country's poor leadership has been identified as a major factor to these crises and conflicts. Perhaps, it could be the major reason for the recent End Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) protest in the country. This paper therefore examines how leaders emerged in Nigeria and the policy formulation in terms of development. The work also traces the reasons for ethno-religious crises, nepotism and corruption by these leaders.

Keywords: *change; development; poverty; inequality; public policy.*

JEL Classification: H83; Y8



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Introduction

Leadership is about power and struggle to capture power. At this level, the ability of such a power is tested in terms of governance. In other words, it is the action of the leaders that determines whether a society makes or lacks progress in areas of socio-economic and political development. Thus, leadership and governance are related and hence inseparable. As governance is all about the exertion of authority by political elites for the upliftment of society, leadership is about capturing power and providing sustainable development to the society. In other words, both are two sides of the same coin.

However, the effectiveness of leadership in governance determines the ratio of development in any society. According to Ologbenla (2007), it is the bad governance and poor leadership that led to underdevelopment and, as such, current political instability. This bad situation is linked to the kinds of policies enacted in the country.

Like in Nigeria, the issue of leadership and governance has not been focused towards development. Rather, it is a “*do or die*” affair. The struggle for leadership in the country has resulted to inter-ethnic war, of a genocide proportion, and other violence activities. In fact, after independence in 1960, the democratic government was disrupted in 1966, following a military coup, which was followed, by a counter coup three months later. In 1967, the country went into a thirty months civil war between the federal troops and secessionist Biafra from 1967 to 1970, which claimed about three million lives. Apart from the brief period (1979 to 1983) in which an elected civilian government was restored back to power, the military left the Nigerian political scene after holding power for thirty years. In 1999, a civilian government was elected to provide good governance. After two decades of the civilian rule, the expectation of Nigerians has been dashed as the successive governments have not been able to address the socio-economy and political problems of the nation. Instead, the quality of lives and fundamental human rights of the people have worsened. The question is, if the overall purpose of government is to deliver good governance, why is the civilian governments that have reigned in current dispensation failed to meet the expectations of the people? The paper therefore examines the level of impact of government policies during the period under review. The paper also assesses the performances of the government in terms of sustainable development and reactions of the people towards the government that led to the ‘*End SARS*’ protests.

Objectives

The objective of the work therefore is to examine the type of leaders and their governance styles toward the sustainable development in the country. The study also evaluates the policies of these leaders and reasons for lopsided implementations of most policies in favour of certain geo-political zones in the country. A critical look between the economy and poverty in the land would be done and solution proffered.

Methodology

The study adopted historical approach in political research and the methodology techniques applied is mainly the secondary data sources. The source of materials for the paper include published and unpublished material such as professional journals, textbooks, newspapers, conference and seminar papers, including other printed materials related to the subject matters.

Theoretical underpinnings

While analysing the concept of leadership, the paper made use of behavioural theory. The inability of other theories to provide the 'gold' to the people led some researchers to look at the behaviours that specific leaders exhibited. According to Robins (1992: 320), the difference between other theories and behavioural theorists lies in their underlining assumptions. In a very simplified manner, the behavioural theory suggests that specific behaviour differentiates a leader from others. This suggests that effective leadership is the result of effective role behaviour. The advocates of this theory suggest that behavioural leaders show concern by establishing trust, mutual respect and rapport with groups. Also, such leaders decide the group structures in the direction of organizing group activities to achieve the societal goals. Kouzes and Posner's (1995), the consistent living out of value is a behavioural way of demonstrating honesty and trustworthiness. Leaders are trusted when their deeds and words match. Trust therefore, is a critical element that enables followers to follow without being coerced by their leaders [Nwosu 2013]. Thus, leadership is a relationship built on trust and confidence without risk, and thus without dynamism, there can be no change. In reality, without change in organisations or political institutions, movements for political systems will certainly decay [Nwosu 2013].

Recently, a new theory known as charismatic leadership emerged with the characteristics of behavioural theory. The theorists found a set of confidence

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among the subordinates who identified themselves with such leaders and their missions [House, 2015]. The charismatic leaders are not only seen as being strongly committed and willing to take on risk but also engage in self-sacrifice to achieve their visions. Such leaders according to MC Gregor (1960) are related to socio-economic and political system, which affect the attitudes and needs of followers. From the foregoing, leadership can be conceptualised as the power to influence people towards attaining the societal goals. Also, it shows how leaders are involved with the policies of providing development to the people. However, this is contrary to the Nigerian leaders as seen later in this work.

Leadership

Various scholars have identified leadership as a major factor in every country's socio-economic and political development. In a broad sense, it refers to people with positions of authority that influence the behaviour and direction of people in governance. In addition, leadership is used here to emphasize the need for leaders to be answerable to somebody or group for their actions in office. This means leaders who can submit to the superior authority of the people during governance. In terms of practical politics, Nwosu (2013) notes that leadership implies the capacity to make and implement decisions that could move the country forward with regards to technology acquisition, development and industrialization. Failure to properly address these issues, as the breakup of the Soviet Union has shown cannot augur well for any nation, including Nigeria. Thus, the government must urgently addresses issues and solve national problems by formulating appropriate public policy. Public Policy, therefore, can be an instrument of unification or a tool to promote disunity when not appropriately formulated and targeted as the current case in Nigeria reflects [Nwosu, 2013].

Governance

Leadership and governance are interrelated and hence inseparable. According to Oxford Advanced Dictionary (2006) it is the activity of governing or controlling the way in which a country is governed. Generally, it is the exercise of power by those in authority for the well-being of the citizenry. Put differently, governance is a process where some actors wield power by enacting and implementing policies for sustainable development in the society [Nñorom, 2006]. Ninolowo (2004), describe governance as the acquisition of powers for the interest and needs of the people by elected representatives and the duty of the state to actualize the legitimate yearnings of the people. It can therefore be mentioned here that good

governance means the proper and effective utilization of resources. The two concepts are involved in strategic direction and policies to integrate every system together for result oriented namely leadership and governance. In a broad sense, leadership is the ability to challenge any complex condition, while good governance is the interest to improve economic performance and poverty reduction in a country.

The Nigeria State, leadership and governance

Nigeria occupies a large area in the continent of Africa and has the largest landmass among all the West African countries. 200 million people presently inhabit the country. In terms of ethnically, there are about 400 ethnic groups and their attendant diversities in language and culture. As a multi ethnic society, three ethnic groups namely the Hausa-Fulanis in the North, Ibos in the East and Yorubas in the West dominate the country. Evidently, these major ethnic groups exert their influence on the country's political, social and economic spheres.

Administratively, the British colonized Nigeria for about 100 years. During the period, the country was divided into three unequal regions, (Northern region, the Eastern region, and the Western region). At independence in 1960, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo man, became the Governor General and ceremonial head of state, a nomenclature which was changed to president in 1963 as Nigeria became a republic. Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, a Fulani man was the Prime Minister, while Chief Awolowo, a Yoruba man, became the leader of the opposition at the centre. The first republic was characterised by turbulence, which resulted into socio-ethnic and political crises. In fact, the various political leaders engaged their ethnic groups to struggle for power at the centre. Due to paucity among these ethnic groups to abide by the rule of governance, the political uncertainty overwhelmed the country. Thus, the first phase of government under the leadership of then Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa was prematurely brought to an end in 1966 when the military assumed control through a coup. Subsequently, the military leadership among other things abolished the regions and created the present 36 states and a federal capital territory before finally handing over power in 1999 to the democratically elected government.

With the return to democratic rule, Nigerians expected that the new civilian leadership would initiate and implement new policies that will transcend the ones established or neglected by the military administration. In fact, every civilian government had promised to address the hydra headed problems of poverty, poor infrastructure, ethno religious crisis and political corruption that have constituted a

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drag to the socio-economic development of the country. For instance, in the month of May 29, 1999, the former president Olusegun Obasanjo pledged to initiate policies that would address the socio-economic problems in the country. In addition, he said that the government would introduce measures aimed at returning the nation's ailing economy to the part of sustainable growth and thereby improve the quality of lives of Nigerians. In addition, he pledged to uphold the fundamental human rights as ensured in the 1999 Constitution and to create an enabling environment for the economic activities to strive as well as to give the private sector a space in management of the economy (Guardian 1999)

Governance, Leadership and Periods during the Fourth Republic (1999-2021)

GOVERNANCE/ LEADERS	PERIOD	PARTY
President Olusegun Obasanjo	29 May 1999 – 29 May 2007	PDP
President Umaru Yar' Adua	29 May 2007 – 5 May 2010	PDP
President Goodluck Jonathan	6 May 2010 – 29 May 2015	PDP
President Muhammadu Buhari	29 May 2015 – Date	APC

Source: *The Author, 2021*

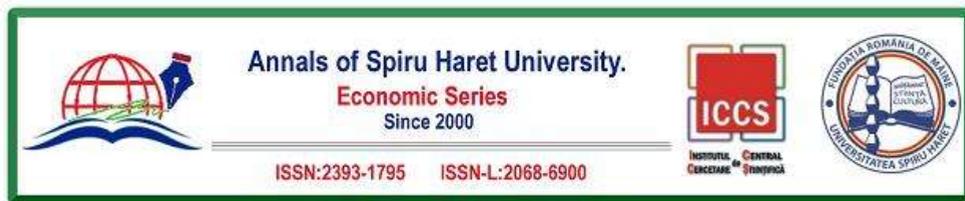
In contrast, Nigerians have yet to see any positive change from the various civilian administrations. Evidently, lives have become poor, brutish, short and nasty for many Nigerians as debilitating poverty now ravages the country. According to the United Nations Poverty index, an average of 70 per cent of the people lives below the poverty line. In fact, the 2019 Poverty and Inequality reports by Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed that poverty in the land is highest when compared to other countries in the world (NBS 2019). According to reports from UNN, World Bank, the IMF, and NBS, about 102.4 million people are living in extreme poverty (NBS 2019). The report further stated that poverty line include the cost of food and non-food items.

Indeed, the failure of the government to meet the expectations of Nigerians has created more challenges in the country. Today, the Nigerian landscape is littered with the debris of failed policies, which among them is the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) designed to eradicate the socio-economic problems and underdevelopment in the land.

As the Nigeria Human Development Reports 1998 (UNDP, 1998) noted, the country is rich with a poor people, at a time when about 2.2 million barrels of crude

oil is produce everyday (National Planning Commission 2004). However, with the problems of financial mismanagement, corruption and misplaced priorities, the oil wealth has not had much impact on the quality of life of the people. The government has been increasing the price of petroleum products, which have always added to the hardship of the people. A cursory observation indicates that leadership accountability is grossly lacking in contemporary Nigerian polity. As Chinua Achebe (1983) asserted, *“the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian state. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leader to rise to the responsibilities to the challenges of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.”* Thus, the crisis in Nigeria which have gained expression in political instability, corruption, communal conflicts, underdevelopment, economic backwardness, debt overhang, etc., are to a very large extent, the product of bad governance.

As Lipset (1969) argued, a crisis of legitimacy is a crisis of change. Thus, modernity if not well managed can engender illegitimacy. Broadly speaking, the people of Nigeria do not need to be told that they are living in a failed state. Nothing is working except crimes and most people involved are let go without punishment and deterrence from the state. Apart from this, the unending tragedy in Southern Kaduna and killing field of Zamfara, Sokoto and Niger states are signs of poor governance. The Boko Haram killings and kidnappings in the states of Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Gombe has reached a record high. The southern Nigeria is not exempted. In the Southwest, Yoruba speaking people are clamouring for Sovereign National Conference that would free them from the killings, kidnappings and other atrocities by the Fulani herdsmen in their land. In fact, there is hardly any part of the country that is free of the blight of general insecurity, banditry and kidnapping. The national policy put in place to ensure inclusive governance has not been put into good use in recent times. For instance, there is a strong perception that the southeast zone is highly marginalised in the scheme of things with only five states while others have six states each, except the northwest with seven. Presently, the country is marred by protests, militancy and insurgency and the government seems not to be coping with the frequency of incidents. Perhaps, it is for this reason that former president Obasanjo stated that president Buhari mismanagement of Nigeria is diverse, and the failure to address insecurity as signs of a failed state and a basket case that urgently needs to be pulled from the brink of collapse [Oweh *et al.*, 2020].



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The 'End SARS' protests: A reflection of bad governance

Nigeria is not a stranger to protests. Protests in Nigeria started with the wave to end colonial rule to the struggle to end military rule. These protests remained relatively small and were not sustained, unlike the recent 2020 'End SARS' protests. The 'End SARS' protests, which was led by the youths was highly decentralized, with neither the usual trade unions nor civil society organisations at the helm. The main focus of the protest is police brutality especially the unit called Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) before and during the covid19 lockdown. In fact, the people had protested for the disbandment of the unit in 2007, 2008 and 2019. However, with little or nothing done by the leadership, this unit continued with its regressive operations and in some cases, criminal activities of extortion, rape and extrajudicial killings.

Despite the protest unidentified leader(s), it was very organized and successful. The efforts by the government to convince the protesters that their requests has been honoured and should give up with the protest proved abortive. Subsequently, the government decided to declare curfew all over the federation. In Lagos State, for example, the protesters at Lekki toll gate who refused to respect the order were shot at by the military personnels killing some harmless and innocent protesters with the government denying that no protester was killed. The heavy casualties on the protesters led to thugs and hoodlums hijacking the largely peaceful protest. The crises and violence later spread across other parts of the country. Indeed, the action led to burning of private and public properties, killing of police officers and innocent citizens. Besides, Nigerian youths in diaspora irrespective of tribes and religion took part in the demonstration. They demanded an end to police extra judicial killings [Osazuwa, 2020].

With calm returning to the Nigerian cities and towns in the aftermath of the protest, properties worth hundreds of millions of Naira were destroyed. In Lagos State alone, the estimated cost of rebuilding both the public and private properties is about one trillion (₦1 trillion) Naira [Osazuwa, 2020]. Many other states have also been counting their human and material losses at the end of the protest.

It is unfortunate that a protest over genuine grievances of such magnitude was not dealt with over years until it metamorphosed into protests and conflicts. Indeed, with right policies, the country could have become a leading world economic power. However, from the wrong choices or policies, the young citizens became very disruptive forces. The out of school children and drop outs including the numbers unemployed in the country are almost twice of the entire population of

Togo. It is therefore not too difficult to understand the pressures that fuel unrest at a time when the economy is in a state of disarray. In fact, the youths while expressing their anger called for both Inspector General of Police and President Muhammad Buhari to resign as a result of leadership failure and bad governance [Olusegun, 2020]. The inability of the government to tackle pressing problems makes it easier for a thousand of lies to multiply. Therefore, the challenges of mass poverty, illiteracy, diseases and underdevelopment must be tackled whilst the people should be politically, economically and socially empowered.

Conclusions

The paper dealt with the various civilian administrations under review. In the cause of the study, the author observed that the various administrations have not met the expectations of the citizenry. The political elites rather than draw inspiration from the people were preoccupied with self-enrichment, neglecting the task of governance and purposeful leadership, which resulted in poor performance. Also, this paper submits that the various successive administrations lack the political will to address the issues of poor education and pitiable healthcare system. The eight months strike by the Nigeria's Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) for the revitalization of the public universities is a case in point. The present administration has depended on borrowing loans from China, IMF, World Bank and other financial Institutions across the globe. In fact, Nigeria's debt has risen to thirty-four trillion by the third quarters of 2020. Besides, there is an on-going comments that current president has decided to allocate most important positions to his tribesmen contrary to the federal character principle. It is a situation, which has made some to refer to Nigeria as a poorly managed and highly divided nation. As Maxists would say, the objective conditions for a change of government are everywhere and noticeable [Bolawole, 2018]. The fact is that the people are prepared to change the leadership. However, the question is who will take over? The answer lies with the youths of Nigeria. It is high time for the youths to galvanise themselves to take over the leadership and their futures in their hands through the ballot box.

Recommendations

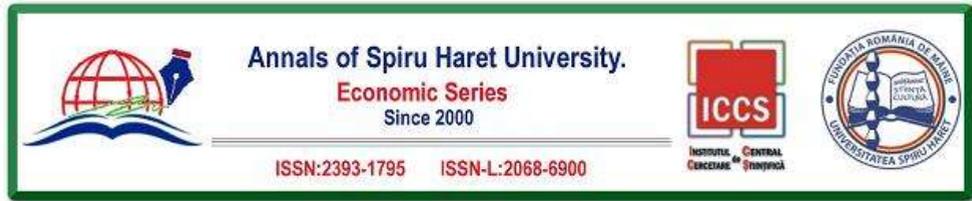
From the issues identified in this paper, the author made the following suggestions to remedy the bad situations in the country.

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- A developed national politics is needed for the emergence of credible leadership that will lead a cohesive and coherent state in which developmental strides can easily be ignited.
- The political elites should not convert public resources to their private use. The actions of these political elites have widened the gap between the rich and the poor, leading to underdevelopment, corruption, nepotism, tribalism, etc.
- There is need for every political leader to follow the principle of federal character in appointments
- The issue of the security operatives should be strengthened to deal with issues of insurgences and terrorism once and for all.
- Poverty in the nation should be tackled and there is an urgent need to provide gainful employment for the youths to avoid another End SARS protests in the future.

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